

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 OMB-01 TRSE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 /082 W

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R 121045Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2790

INFO AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PARAMARIBO 0710

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, NS

SUBJ: ELECTIONS BEFORE END OF 1977--BUT WHEN?

REF : PARAMARIBO 0662

1. SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH PRIME MINISTER ARRON'S REFUSAL TO HOLD EARLY ELECTIONS HAS GENERATED CHARGES THAT HIS GOVERNMENT IS NO LONGER CREDIBLE, HE SEEMS TO HAVE DECIDED TO WEATHER OUT THE STORM AND TO WAIT FOR WHAT HE WILL CONSIDER A MORE OPPORTUNE TIME. THE OPPOSITON, THOUGH PUBLICLY UNHAPPY WITH THIS SITUATION, DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE IN A POSITION OR INCLINED TO TAKE MORE MILITANT ACTIONS DESIGNED TO FORCE THE ARRON GOVERNMENT TO CHANGE ITS MIND. END SUMMARY.

2. THE JULY 26 DEFEAT OF THE OPPOSITION VHP'S MOTION ASSERTING THAT PRIME MITISTER ARRON HAD PROMISED PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS WITHIN EIGHT MONTHS OF SURINAM'S INDEPENDENCE, AND THE AUGUST 9 REJECTION BY PARLIAMENT OF A SECOND INTERPELLATION ON THE SAME QUESTION, MAY HAVE CLOSED A CHAPTER IN THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF SURINAM, BUT IT CERTAINLY HAS NOT HALTED THE PUBLIC DEBATE OVER THE CREDIBILITY OF THE ARRON GOVERNMENT. ON THE CONTRARY, THE PAST FEW WEEKS HAVE SEEN SHARP CITICISM OF
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ARRON'S POSTION AND SCARCELY A PUBLIC WORD IN HIS DEFENSE,

UNTIL RECENTLY THE GOVERNMENT FELT COMPELLED TO ISSUE THROUGH ITS INFORMATION SERVICE A STATEMENT ASSERTING THAT THE CREDIBILITY OF THE ARRON GOVERNMENT IS NOT BEING QUESTIONED BY FOREIGN POWERS OR FOREIGN OR DOMESTIC INVESTORS. HOWEVER, IF THERE IS ONE THING SURINAMERS LOVE TO DO IT IS TO TALK LOCAL POLITICS, AND WE HAVE YET TO SEE BRAVE PUBLIC DECLARATIONS TRANSLATED INTO EFFECTIVE ACTIONS WHICH MIGHT CONVINCE THE PRIME MINISTER TO CHANGE HIS MIND.

3. FOLLOWING ARRON'S REPLY TO DISSIDENT MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT HINDORIE'S INTERPELLATION REGARDING THE HOLDING OF EARLY ELECTIONS (I.E., BEFORE THE CONSTITUTIONALLY REQUIRED DATE OF NOVEMBER 1977) AND THE DEFEAT OF THE VHP MOTION DECLARING THAT ARRON HAD IN FACT PROMISED ELECTIONS TO BE HELD NO LATER THAN JULY 19, 1976 OPPOSITION LEADER JAGGERNATH LACHMON CALLED A MASS MEETING OF THE VHP AUGUST 1 TO DISCUSS THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION. THE REPORTEDLY WELL-ATTENDED MEETING (LACHMON CLAIMED 4,000) PASSED A RESOLUTION WHICH IN EFFECT CHARGED THE PRIME MINISTER WITH BEING A LIAR AND UNTRUSTWORTHY. ALL THREE OF THE MAJOR DUTCH LANGUAGE DAILIES HAVE ECHOED THE SAME THEME, NAMELY THAT ARRON CAN NO LONGER BE BELIEVED. OTHER UNFULFILLED ELECTION PROMISES HAVE ALSO BEEN BROUGHT FORTH TO BOLSTER THE CASE AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT.

4. LACHMON HIMSELF TOLD AN EMBOFF THAT HE INTENDS TO CONTINUE THE THEME THAT THE PRIME MINISTER CANNOT BE BELIEVED FROM NOW UNTIL THE TIME ELECTIONS ARE EVENTUALLY HELD. HE STRESSED THIS POINT DURING THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE PRECEDING THE AUGUST 9 REJECTION BY A VOTE OF 16-15 OF HIS OWN INTERPELLATION ON THE ELECTIONS QUESTION. LACHMON DOES NOT, HOWEVER, ADVOCATE THE USE OF MORE FORCEFUL TACTICS, SUCH AS STRIKES, TO COMPEL ARRON TO CHANGE HIS STAND, ALTHOUGH HE HAS CALLED FOR A VAGUE MOBILIZATION OF THE POPULATION IN DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACY AND SAYS PRIVATELY HIS IS PREPARED TO LEND HIS SUPPORT TO SUCH EFFORTS IF THEY ARE UNDERTAKEN BY OTHERS. LACHMON APPARENTLY IS COUNTING ON A STEADY EROSION OF PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN ARRON TO INCREASE THE CHANCES OF THE VHP IN THE NEXT ELECTION, OR POSSIBLY TO FORCE ARRON INTO A RENEWED NPS-VHP COALITION, THEREBY SHUTTING OUT MINISTER OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS BRUMA'S PNR; AND HE SEEMS PREPARED TO WAIT OUT THE

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REMAINING FIFTEEN MONTHS BEFORE ELECTIONS MUST BE HELD WITH THIS EXPECTATION.

5. LACHMON, TOO, HOWEVER, MUST TREAD A CAREFUL PATH. DISSIDENT VHP-ER GEORGE HINDORIE, WHO NOW REPRESENTS A GROUP OF YOUNG TURK HINDUSTANIS CALLING THEMSELVES THE HERNLEUWDE PROGRESSIEVE PARTIJ (HPP), HAS ALREADY CHARGED THAT LACHMON DOES NOT REALLY WANT EARLY ELECTIONS. HINDORIE REPORTEDLY ONCE SAID HE WILL RESIGN

FROM PARLIAMENT IF ELECTIONS ARE NOT HELD WITHIN A DATE TO BE SET BY HIM, ALTHOUGH HE NOW MAINTAINS HE DOES NOT WISH TO WASTE TIME REHASHING PAST HISTORY. IT IS LIKELY HOWEVER, HE WILL CONTINUE TO PRESSURE THE LEADER OF THE VHP TO TAKE A MORE FORTHRIGHT POSITION AGAINST ARRON.

6. IT WAS HINDORIE'S INTERPELLATION THAT WAS ACCEPTED BY PARLIAMENT AND COMPELLED ARRON TO EXPLAIN WHAT HE HAD MEANT LAST NOVEMBER WITH REGARD TO EVENTUAL ELECTIONS, PERHAPS BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT COALITION WOULD RATHER NOT HAVE GIVEN THE CREDIT FOR THIS TO LACHMON. PENDING THE HANDLING OF HIS OWN INTERPELLATION, WHICH HAS NOW BEEN REJECTED, LACHMON HAD TO SETTLE FOR A MOTION DECLARING THE SENSE OF PARLIAMENT THAT ARRON HAD PROMISED ELECTIONS, A MOVE THAT WAS DESTINED FOR DEFEAT FROM THE BEGINNING.

7. ARRON OF COURSE HAS THE ADVANTAGE OF INCUMBENCY, AND HE CAN BE EXPECTED TO BIDE HIS TIME UNTIL HE IS CERTAIN THAT HIS OWN PROSPECTS ARE BRIGHTEST. HAVING DECLARED THAT TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES, INCLUDING COMPLETION OF A VOTERS' LIST AND ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ELECTION COMMISSION, MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE

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FM AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 PARAMARIBO 0710

TO HOLD ELECTIONS THIS YEAR, HE HAS LEFT OPEN THE TIMING OF ELECTIONS IN 1977. THE COMMON WISDOM IS THAT HE FEARS THE

POWER OF PNR LEADER BRUMA, WHOSE PRINCIPAL STRENGTH LIES IN HIS PARTY'S CONTROL OF IMPORTANT LABOR UNIONS INCLUDING THE PARANAM MINeworkERS UNION AT SURALCO. BUT, IN FACT, BRUMA, WHO HAS SHOWN ONLY MINIMAL ELECTORAL STRENGTH IN THE PAST, COMMANDS NO GREAT PUBLIC SUPPORT AND IS CIRCUMSCRIBED AS TO HOW FAR HE CAN EXPLOIT HIS UNION STRENGTH WITHOUT ANTAGONIZING THE ELECTORATE THROUGH ADVERSE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES AND DELAYS IN DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS, WHICH ARE BOUND TO RESULT FROM ANY SERIOUS DISRUPTIONS, PARTICULARLY IN THE MINING SECTOR.

8. ARRON WOULD SEEM TO HAVE THE UPPER HAND FOR THE TIME BEING AND FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. THE STATEMENT HE MADE ALLEGEDLY PROMISING ELECTIONS WITHIN EIGHT MONTHS OF SURINAM'S INDEPENDENCE IS AMBIGUOUS AT BEST, AND HIS OWN INTERPRETATION THAT HE MEANT ONLY TO DISCUSS THIS QUESTION WITH THE POLITICAL PARTIES IS THEORETICALLY TENABLE. IN ADDITION, HE IS STILL RIDING THE CREST OF HIS WELL-REGARDED TRIP TO BRAZIL, HIS INTERVENTION TO INSURE A NEW THREE-YEAR PRODUCTION AGREEMENT WITH SURALCO, HIS MEDIATION ROLE IN SURALCO'S SUBSEQUENT DISPUTE WITH ITS PARANAM LABOR UNION, THE CONTINUING FLOW OF CONFIDENTIAL

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DUTCH DEVELOPMENT AID (ALBEIT WITH SOME PROCEDURAL FITS AND STARTS), AND THE GENERAL EUPHORIA OF THE FIRST YEAR OF INDEPENDENCE. HAVING WAITED THIS LONG FOR ELECTIONS, MOREOVER, THE QUESTION OF WHAT HE MAY HAVE SAID IS IN FACT MOOT, AND HE FACES NO COMPELLING REASONS TO CALL ELECTIONS ANY TIME SOON. WE BELIEVE THAT SURINAMERS IN GENERAL ARE PREPARED TO GRANT HIM THE TIME, AT LEAST THROUGH THE END OF THIS YEAR, TO TRY TO GET THEIR COUNTRY ON THE ROAD TO INCREASED DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY.

9. OF COURSE, WE CANNOT DISCOUNT COMPLETELY THE POSSIBILITY THAT DRASTIC DISRUPTIONS IN THE ECONOMY, POLITICALLY INSPIRED OR OTHERWISE, OR SERIOUS EMBARRASSMENT TO THE GOVERNMENT (FOR EXAMPLE IN THE MATTER OF POSSIBLE QUESTIONABLE PAYMENTS BY ALCOA AND REYNOLDS) COULD FORCE ARRON'S HAND. IN ADDITION, WE CANNOT DISMISS OUT OF HAND PERSISTENT RUMORS THAT ARRON AND LACHMON MAY HAVE REACHED A MODUS VIVENDI DESIGNED TO FREEZE BRUMA OUT OF THE MAINSTREAM OF SURINAM POLITICS AND TO PRODUCE A REVIVAL OF THE TRADITIONAL NSP-VHP COALITION WHEN THE RIGHT TIME FOR ELECTIONS IS MUTUALLY DETERMINED. BUT OUR BEST ESTIMATE AT THIS TIME IS THAT THERE IS NOTHING NOW OR IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE WHICH WOULD FORCE THE PRIME MINISTER TO ALTER HIS POSITION.
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